

5.1. Strengthen strategic guidance, communication and coordination of the Montana tourism industry

This Strategic Action strengthens Montana's tourism product and marketing efforts and builds respect for the tourism industry in Montana.

Recommended Tactics

TAC, MTOT

- » Work together to select the most pressing priorities from the Strategic Plan for Montana's tourism industry, giving consideration to the priorities of individual Regions and CVBs. Adjust the industry-wide priorities over time.
- » Communicate priorities and the rationale behind them clearly and consistently to all stakeholders.
- » Continue efforts to make communication with and reporting by Regions and CVBs easier, efficient, and effective.

MTOT

- » Actively manage the strategic plan as a "living document" to maintain its relevance:
 - establish a formal process by which the strategic plan may be amended;
 - review and moderate feedback from stakeholders;
 - incorporate additional strategic actions and recommended tactics, as needed;
 - alter strategic actions or recommended tactics as needed to improve their efficacy; and
 - eliminate strategic actions or recommended tactics that are found to be ineffective or counterproductive.
- » Give businesses and organizations a clear and convincing business case for being actively engaged with MTOT, Regions, CVBs, and the Strategic Plan.
- » Continue seeking out ways to strengthen two-way communication with all stakeholders and make it easy for even small stakeholders to remain engaged
- » Develop a "community relations" plan to assess, guide, and improve the effectiveness of communications with all stakeholders. Include specific strategic objectives to guide communication with businesses and organizations, such as:
 - helping them understand how the Montana Brand directly applies to their operations;
 - ensuring that they see the MTOT, Regions, and CVBs marketing campaigns that are inspiring their potential customers;
 - giving them key insights from data and analytics, and showing how these insights can help their businesses and organizations; and

- building broad awareness of technical and financial resources available to businesses and organizations and noting how to make use of the resources (such as the strategic plan, knowledge and learning tools, research, cooperative marketing opportunities, grant opportunities, and sustainable business training/certification).
- » Establish mechanisms for peer collaboration amongst businesses and organizations – help them work together on their own initiative by providing them with some simple tools. For example, consider establishing online discussion boards (e.g., Yahoo Groups) where stakeholders can collaborate on specific shared concerns, objectives, or initiatives. Reach out to encourage participation by a broad spectrum of tourism partners. If discussion boards are to be used, adopt protocols to be used by all boards; for example, limiting the scope of discussion, setting procedures for designating moderators, setting out the requirements for public access.
- » Identify specific opportunities for cooperative efforts with Tourism Partners, open the conversation with the partner(s), and make the broader tourism community aware of the partnership. (For example, to implement Strategic Action 1.4.)

Regions, CVBs

- » Develop a “community relations” plan to assess, guide, and improve the effectiveness of communications with all stakeholders in the Region/community.
- » Communicate organizational strategies broadly and clearly to all stakeholders in the Region/community.
- » Work cooperatively and communicate freely with other Regions/CVBs regarding implementation of the strategic plan and other actions requiring a coordinated effort.
- » Recommend modifications to the strategic plan to MTOT, as needed and with sound rationale. Recommend incorporation of additional actions or tactics developed by or within the Region/community that have proven successful.

Communities, Tribes, Businesses & Organizations

- » Understand the visitor experience promised by the Montana Brand, and how this promise is inspiring visitors through the marketing and promotion of MTOT, Regions, and CVBs. (Then consider how your tourism product could fulfill the visitors’ expectations so you can convert the visitors into your customers.)
- » Commit to staying aware of what MTOT and your Tourism Region/CVB are doing, using the communication tool(s) that fit you best. (Then consider how you could leverage their efforts to get the greatest benefit for your business or organization.)
- » Take advantage of training and learning opportunities offered by MTOT, Regions, and CVBs.
- » Use the research conducted by ITRR and that contracted by MTOT, Regions, and CVBs to strengthen your business or organization.

- » Provide feedback to MTOT, Regions, and any other relevant industry members regarding effective or ineffective strategic actions. Share success stories as well as any additional information and resources that you discover.
- » Seek opportunities to collaborate with your fellow tourism businesses and organizations – share ideas and experiences, discuss challenges you share, and brainstorm solutions.

Indicators of Success

- » MTOT, Regions, and CVBs have “community relations plans” in place to strengthen communications with stakeholders.
- » Communications from MTOT, Regions and CVBs to businesses and organizations are effective and valued by businesses and organizations, as demonstrated by broad stakeholder engagement and implementation of ideas (shared through the described communication and feedback mechanisms).
- » MTOT, Regions and CVBs are aware of and attuned to the needs and concerns of industry members. Marketing and promotion efforts by DMOs are overtly connected to sales and delivery of the brand promise by frontline businesses and organizations.
- » The strategic plan is amended to incorporate new, innovative, and effective strategic actions, as well as emerging best practices and knowledge for DMOs and industry members, while unnecessary or ineffective elements of the Strategic Plan are deleted.
- » Feedback and success stories are contributed by a variety of stakeholders.

Background & Rationale

One of the key challenges of marketing a destination is that the “product” being sold is actually a *collection* of products and services (with fragmented ownership and many stakeholders) as well as a range of public goods (e.g., landscape, scenery, atmosphere) that *together* provide the visitor experience. Communication and coordination are essential for success and a vast body of research exists regarding the importance of these and the challenge they pose.

Destination marketing organizations (DMOs) play a central role in facilitating collaboration and building a cohesive tourism product by providing leadership, involving stakeholders in a meaningful way, and communicating effectively.

Current technologies (e.g. social media) allow the visitor experience to impact directly and immediately upon the success of branding and marketing. The marketing role of the DMO must therefore be closely integrated and aligned with the delivery role of other stakeholders. *The brand established by DMOs must resonate with stakeholders and it must be realistically deliverable by the stakeholders.* Businesses and organizations, in turn, must pay attention and respond to market feedback offered by the DMOs. While destination marketing organizations cannot control the marketing activities of individual players within the tourism industry, they can lead and coordinate them. DMOs can bring stakeholders together to cooperate rather than compete, and to pool resources to support an integrated marketing mix and delivery system. As alignment grows, DMOs are becoming prominent “destination developers”, acting as catalysts for tourism development and supporting industry members’ efforts to improve their competitiveness.

One factor that increases the difficulty of coordination by DMOs is the fact that the majority of tourism industry members are small businesses or organizations with limited time, resources, and capacity. After handling the immediate demands of operating their business or organization, there is little time left to attend to big picture tourism strategies. In order to win the active support and participation of front line stakeholders, it is valuable for the Regions and CVBs to offer them a strong business case for engagement in DMO efforts and provide guidance that has immediate and direct applicability to the operation or success of the front line business or organization.

Today there are many means of communication – intranet, online communities, email, RSS feeds, and snail mail, to name but a few. MTOT, Regions, CVBs and the TAC should collaborate to identify the most effective means of reaching stakeholders as part of the electronic media strategy (see Strategic Action 4.2).